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Commons in a changing Europe

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The International Journal of the Commons published in 2008 a special issue on “The commons in Europe: from past to future” (IJC Vol. 2, No. 2, July 2008) (Bravo and De Moor 2008; Gerber et al. 2008; Janssen et al. 2008; Lana Berasain 2008; Sandberg 2008; Schlueter 2008; Short 2008; Paavola 2008). This volume traced the development of European commons from the Middle Ages to the modern environmental services organized as commons. In the northern and Western European continent, most historical commons had by the end of the 19th century changed their character by the enclosure movement and general land consolidation. But it also showed that many resources in the European region are still governed by common user associations or by community institutions in the form of alpine forests, mountain pastures etc. The volume also identified a number of “new commons” in the European region (leisure areas, ecosystem services etc.) that has caught the interest of commons scholars.

In summing up the contribution of the first IASC European Regional meeting in Brescia (2006) and that first special issue, there was a discussion of what was missing at that stage in the development of commons scholarship in Europe. One type of missing research identified was connected to the large field of fisheries and use of coastal areas (coastal commons) for aquaculture and sea-ranching. Another type of missing research was related to urban commons and new ways of organizing various community services.

A third important missing issue, probably due to historical reasons of IASC, was the development of Commons in Eastern Europe and post communist states. Some papers reporting from such studies were presented at the Brescia conference, but none of them were presented in the 2008 Volume. One reason for this could be that Eastern European researchers were still partially isolated from the rest of the commons research community. Another reason might have been the incredible transformations many commons in Eastern Europe are going through since the fall of communism so that the main emphasis of scholars is on current changes, and not the past. The editors therefore urged the IASC to stimulate the presentation of good papers from Eastern Europe at future IASC conferences. This call was heeded by CPR scholars in Europe who planned the next European IASC meeting.

The IASC European Meeting 2011 was therefore hosted by the Agricultural University Plovdiv in Bulgaria from September 14th to 17th, 2011. It was chaired by Insa Theesfeld from the Leibniz Institute of Agricultural Development in Central and Eastern Europe in Halle (Saale), Germany and by Achim Schlüter from the Leibniz Center for Tropical Marine Ecology in Bremen, Germany. The conference was scientifically and organizationally supported by Audun Sandberg from the University of Nordland in Bodø, Norway and by Ivan Penov, Violeta Dirimanova and Boryana Ivanova from the Agricultural University Plovdiv in Bulgaria. The 2011 conference theme, “Shared Resources in a Rapidly Changing World,” put emphasis on the currently well-recognized fact that many, if not most, resources require a shared management regime, due to complex social-ecological interactions, which neither stop at national boundaries nor at private property. Yet,

a multitude of combined and mixed governance regimes are necessary to manage these resources in an efficient and sustainable way. Accelerated change creates a particular threat to joint management regimes, but it also opens a window of opportunities for us as researchers to study new natural resource management solutions. One aim of the conference was to increase the awareness of commons questions in Middle, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. The conference contributions were organized into four sub-themes:

1. Multiple Drivers to Change in Common Management
2. Post Socialist Commons: the Road Ahead
3. Methods Investigating Complex Common Property Regimes
4. Multi-level Governance

These themes reflect the tendency that the relevant drivers of development become increasingly more diverse. Climate change, globalization, migration, depopulation, etc., show that many factors challenge collective governance regime. This complexity and rate of change was best exemplified in the region of the conference, the Eastern European countries. While the overall aim of such IASC European regional meetings is to strengthen the network of European researchers who are investigating shared management regimes, irrespective of resource types, the 2011 Plovdiv Conference had the specific purpose to bring Eastern European commons and commons scholarship onto the international scene. This strategy is crucial for a relatively young and interdisciplinary scientific association like IASC which should constantly be looking for new solutions to actual collective dilemmas on the ground. Especially theme 2 focused on post-socialist commons here and the process of change they have been going through during the last 20 years. One quarter of the participants in the conference came from Middle, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. In editing this Special Issue of the *International Journal of the Commons*, we have therefore especially targeted analyses of the Eastern European commons and on giving Eastern European commons scholars a platform to make their works known to a wider public.

This volume of the *International Journal of the Commons* (IJC) has a specific aim to increase the understanding of Eastern European Commons and thus to broaden the knowledge of Eastern European Commons. The volume therefore starts with an overview comparative article by Miguel Laborda-Pemán and Tine De Moor (2013): “A Tale of Two Commons. Some Preliminary Hypotheses on the Long-Term Development of the Commons in Western and Eastern Europe, 1000–1900”. In this article the authors offer the readers a broad explanatory framework for the divergence in the development of institutions for collective action, in particular commons, between Eastern and Western Europe. While the areas west of the Elbe were particularly early with the development of collective arrangements of natural resource management, the Eastern side had rather slow and less intensive development of such collective arrangements. The article explains

in different ways how these differences emerged and why they still persist, despite the many dramatic changes in social structure in both Eastern and Western Europe through the centuries.

In their article “Opportunities and Constraints of Adopting Market Governance in Protected Areas in Central and Eastern Europe”, Otto and Chobotova (2013) show how the introduction and expansion of market governance is particularly challenging in post-socialist countries, where the state command and control economy for many decades disrupted the functioning of markets. In addition, basic institutions, such as clearly defined property rules, only existed in very limited areas. A particular challenge in these countries is that the benefits provided by protected nature and ecosystems at most times cannot be captured by direct adoption of conventional market-based private entities, at the same time as government agencies responsible for protected areas management experience financial difficulties with the maintenance of conservation activities. Like in Western Europe, maintaining protected areas also imposes costs on local communities and households. Therefore, the solutions to the current difficulties facing protection and biodiversity institutions in Eastern Europe require them also to become more accountable service providers, generating public benefits through both more effective regulations and market governing instruments.

In their article “Pastoral commons use in Romania and the role of the Common Agricultural Policy”, Sutcliffe et al. (2013) analyse the changing role of common pastures for local communities in Târnava Mare Region of Southern Transylvania in Romania. Common grazing in Romania, as in much of Europe, is a historical tradition, and despite great upheavals in land ownership in Romania during the past century, this form of land use still plays an important role. Whilst traditional governance systems of the commons are still partly intact, new institutions are forming in response to the recent substantial changes in agriculture and rural life since Romania’s accession to the EU and the EU Common Agricultural Policy in 2007. In the Târnava Mare area the number of active users of the commons is decreasing and those who have more animals are increasingly grazing these on long-term leased or private land, thus no longer effectively participating in the commons. The mechanism behind this is the relatively low prices for agricultural products and the EU agricultural support payments, which now are a major factor in the financial viability of farming in Romania. The article analyses these mechanisms and concludes that the future of Romanian commons will hinge on the success of rural communities to self organise and to take advantage of the new opportunities presented by the changing rural context of pastoral commons use.

In her article on “Institutions of participation and environmental sustainability: A multi-level analysis from irrigation management in Harran Plain, Turkey, Özerol (2013) examines the relationship between farmer participation and environmental sustainability from an institutional perspective in the context of Harran Plain, one of the newest and largest irrigated areas in Turkey. Harran Plain undergoes social, economic and institutional change due to the expansion of large-scale irrigation and the establishment of irrigation associations. These changes, however, trigger

an environmental change in the form of waterlogging and soil salination. The concepts of ‘institutional scale’ and ‘institutional alignment’ are applied to critically analyse the narratives regarding the causes of excessive water use, which is a collective action problem playing a significant role in increased waterlogging and soil salinity in Harran Plain. Empirical findings demonstrate that a low degree of institutional alignment among the rules at different levels constitutes an obstacle against taking actions to prevent excessive water use. Major issues are identified as the lack of water rights at plot and district levels; the exclusion of farmers from the planning of irrigation seasons; the inefficient monitoring of irrigation frequencies and fee collections, and the lack of mechanisms to monitor the operations of irrigation associations. The application of institutional scale and institutional alignment also contribute to the understanding of social-ecological systems by facilitating the systematic analysis of institutions and the identification of areas for institutional change.

Finally, in their article on “The role of contracts in saving biodiversity in the post-socialist Czech Republic”, Prazan and Theesfeld (2013) analyse the effects of the EU Agri-Environmental Schemes as a voluntary policy measure of the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union. Since 2004, these have been implemented in the post-socialist new Member States. These agri-environmental schemes should help to achieve a higher level of biodiversity in protected landscapes and in particular, the article analyses whether such types of contracts between farmers and state organisations represent a useful tool in the protection of shared natural resources, such as biodiversity. In addition, the article also explains the reasons why the administrative structure of such policy measure tend to be very complex due to the overlap of responsibilities among various administrative units, and the need to regulate transactions between farmers and government.

With the publication of these articles from the 2nd European Regional meeting of the IASC, the IJC has filled in one of the gaps that emerged out of the first meeting in Brescia. Further meetings will hopefully fill in other and discover new gaps in CPR research on the old continent.

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